An Introduction to "'The Politics of Location': Feminist and Queer Spaces within Global Contexts"

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This special issue of *Gramma* aims to explore the politics of location by laying specific emphasis on the complex interactions between space, temporality, gender, and movement. It addresses questions related, on the one hand, with the ways our locatedness constructs our identities, and, on the other hand, with ways gendered subjects may queer or challenge the fixity of local or global spaces and invent new modes of relating with them. If space, as the leading human geographer Tim Creswell has argued, cannot be reduced to a mere dot on a map, but is always associated with a set of ideas, then space and mobility are two concepts inextricably linked. Space, as social scientist Doreen Massey contends in a similar vein, is not static but dynamic, as it carries narratives (for example, stories related with who has lived or lives there, what past or present events took or take place there, how it relates with other spaces, what its borders are, etc.) that are open to interpretation and can therefore vary. Temporality should be regarded similarly. So postcolonial and transnational feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty speaks of a "temporality of struggle," which "suggests an insistent, simultaneous, nonsynchronous process characterized by multiple locations, rather than a search for origins and endings" (120). The essays in our issue will attempt to throw light to some of the narratives that real or virtual spaces incorporate and unravel the power threads entangled in these stories. While gender is a point of departure in the analyses all essays undertake, its intersections with power structures pertaining to race, age, class, sexuality, and ethnicity also play a crucial part, as they enable more insightful understandings of the politics of location.

The title of our issue borrows from Adrienne Rich's 1984 essay "Notes toward a Politics of Location," wherein she renounces the idea of universal sisterhood upon which a large part of first- and second-wave feminist thought relied. Drawing from personal experience, and acknowledging the fact that her own subject position as a white, North-American, Jewish, lesbian, female poet shaped her mode of perception, Rich points towards the necessity of establishing a feminist discourse that resists white circumscribing and accommodates women's experience in all its diversity. Although Rich finds the idea of contesting locality fascinating, she insists on its importance and challenges Virginia Woolf's celebrated declaration in her anti-war book-length essay *Three Guineas*: "as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (125). For Rich, the tendency to adopt the generic identity of "a woman," or to use phrases like "we, women" instead of the "I" pronoun, or dictums that begin

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with "women have always …," is based on the false assertion that all women's cultures are identical and rooted in some western tradition.

When Woolf's phrase is read within the whole context of *Three Guineas*, however, it becomes clear that it does not exactly undermine the politics of location. Woolf never loses track of her place of belonging, which is the very specific class of "the daughters of educated men," as she terms it, that is, white middle-class women who had the benefit of indirect education through their erudite fathers but were never granted equal rights with their brothers. Woolf never divests herself of her white, middle-class, intellectually elite identity, and her seemingly oversimplified announcement "As a woman my country is the whole world" is less a denial of her Englishness than a realization that the English law has treated her as an outsider and deprived her of a number of rights bestowed on men. In the solutions to stopping war she proposes in *Three Guineas* (the building of women's colleges and the open access to women in all professions), it is evident that Woolf sees an urgent need not to abolish, but to revise Englishness. Following Rich, the limitation of Woolf's argument is that her call for revision is linked to the women of her class first and to all other women subsequently.

What motivated Rich and a number of later feminists to interpret Woolf's quote as an a-political cry for global sisterhood was perhaps a pressing concern to warn late twentieth-century feminism against generalizations that efface the rare specificities of womanhood and its tricky crossing with a variety of other dominant discourses, especially since Woolf's influence on second- and third-wave feminism has been pivotal. In 1994, a decade after "Notes" and in line with Rich, the feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti saw the publication of her book *Nomadic Subjects*. In it Braidotti is very critical towards the trust in utopian no-places that Woolf spawned, referring specifically to multilocated feminists, like Hélène Cixous, Lucy Irigaray and Seyla Benhabib, who adopted and reinforced this stance of "planetary exile," as she calls it (Braidotti 55). Furthermore, in her 2013 study on *British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary*, Jane Garrity goes as far as to characterize Woolf's statement as an "exuberant embrace of the rhetoric of territorial expansionism" (15). Although this may sound like an extreme reading of Woolf's epigram, given her indisputable anti-fascist, anti-imperialist standpoint in *Three Guineas,* Garrity offers a thought-provoking perspective, since the ease with which Woolf proclaims herself a global citizen is indeed a luxury conferred on her precisely because she is already a British citizen. If as a woman Woolf was barred from male demarcated locations, as a member of the "kinetic elite"[1] she had the freedom to imagine herself a global inhabitant. Moreover, when read within the context of our own time, the second decade of the twenty-first century, so profoundly shaped and shaken by the world refugee crisis, Woolf's plea for homelessness, rings with insensitivity, to say the least. When millions of people worldwide are displaced by force because of wars, persecution,

[1] This is a term coined by the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells and adopted by Cresswell in his article "Citizenship in Worlds of Mobility" (115). It refers to privileged people granted smooth and protected transitions from place to place or lodging in secure and isolated enclaves at the expense of non-elite citizens who are subject to a smothering system of constant surveillance. The term is used anachronistically here, since Woolf belonged to an analogous early twentieth-century elite class that was allowed guarded and comfortable stay and mobility.

or human right violations, when they are denied entry into other countries, or deprived of the right to belong to one, proclaiming to "want no country" as an expression of opposition to patriarchy is admittedly a callously privileged rhetorical posture.

Recognizing the intricate connections between gender and other modes of classification, Braidotti maintains that "generalizations about women should be replaced by cartographic accuracy, attention to and accountability for differences among women" (56). In lieu of what she interprets as an evasive and elitist trend of cosmopolitanism, which is very class- and race-specific, Braidotti counterposes the idea of active nomadism. Instead of defying boundaries, Braidotti's nomad is conscious of the instability and permeability of boundaries, embraces change, and aspires for a shifting identity. Like Giles Deleuze's "rhizome," Braidotti's nomad grows silently and imperceptibly underground and sideways in a counter-hegemonic non-phallogocentric way; moreover, like Donna Haraway's "cyborg," the nomad resists "fixed, unitary, and exclusionary views of subjectivity" (Braidotti 58). In the new global capitalist cities around the world, which accommodate a conglomerate of traditional and hypermodern cultures, the nomad's lack of nostalgia for the past and openness to transition offers a viable solution to the menacing threats of xenophobia and racial, ethnic, or sexual intolerance.

The power of roots then lies not in their steadiness but in their capacity to flow, which is an impossible, imagined, and oxymoronic condition that one would think can apply only to water plants. It is interesting to observe that Braidotti's opening quote in the first chapter of *Nomadic Subjects* is from Woolf's 1931 novel *The Waves* and her deeply rooted, fully embodied socialite, albeit mobile character, Jinny. "I am rooted, but I flow," Jinny announces, while discovering in her fluttering, rippling, and streaming mobility "a thousand capacities spring[ing] up in [her]" (102). It is exactly upon this astonishing process of roots converting into routes that not only Braidotti's nomadic subject, but also modern theories of mobility rely. Location is not refuted by sociologists or human geographers, but examined in its complexity and open-endedness, and consequently its interminable ability to signify. When perceived both as a geopolitical and temporal notion and as something imagined through language, it becomes evident that location generates narratives which call for cautious interpretation.

Feminist theory has long been focusing on how space is gendered, how women (and men and transgender people) are allocated restricted positions, and how women's mobility may enable dislocations or relocations and so endow them with agency. Unless we consider, however, questions related with how, when, where, at what speed, how often, or why one moves in contemporary globalized localities, we will always have only a fraction of the stories we're trying to salvage. In order to politicize location today we need to approach it as a fluid signifier related to both roots and uprooting, and explore the intricate ways in which the spaces we occupy (our bodies included, as they are the first and foremost spaces we belong to) build our subjectivities and the ways subjects engineer spaces. It is also crucial to bear in mind, while investigating space in its binding relation to mobility, that movement is not always identical with resistance, but may reproduce gender, racial, sexual or other hierarchies. Global and local patterns of power may intersect in multiple, contradictory, and ambiguous manners, and the birth of new global societies

may produce new forms of domination, which can be fought only when women acknowledge and bring together their diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and historical backgrounds. For Mohanty, the development of transnational solidarity among women proves crucial to reasserting women as agents of feminist politics. The future of an effective feminist politics depends upon alliances rooted in and flowing across heterogeneous gender positionalities.

Such an understanding of feminism informs the eight essays that comprise "'The Politics of Location': Feminist and Queer Spaces within Global Contexts." Apart from feminist studies, these pieces cross various fields and subfields, including the following: American studies, comparative cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies, geography, Holocaust studies, literary and film studies, media studies, musicology, Palestine studies, postcolonial studies, psychoanalysis, rhetoric studies, sociology, and South Asian studies. All of the essays, albeit from different cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives, are concerned with questions of boundaries, boundedness, regulation, and restriction and, accordingly, with issues of agency and resistance, as well as ethical evasion and failure.

The special issue begins with Margaret Sönser Breen's "The Locations of Politics: Highsmith's *The Price of Salt*, Todd Haynes' *Carol*, and American Post-War and Contemporary Cultural Landscapes." Paying special attention to both the spatial and temporal dimensions of a "politics of location," this essay offers a comparative analysis of Patricia Highsmith's landmark mid-century lesbian novel and its recent film counterpart, Todd Haynes's *Carol*. Breen analyzes the queerness of these two works not only within the context of their particular genres and genre histories but also in relation to a twenty-first-century audience's engagement with them. Of special interest here is the issue of mobility. Both novel and film remind readers that mid-century lesbian bodies, especially when they travel, are always already under cultural surveillance. How does such policing of lesbian mobility foreground various kinds of interrogations of other potentially suspect bodies within both the mid-century setting for the story that both Highsmith and Haynes tell and the cultural context that an early twenty-first-century readership inhabits? Stated in slightly different terms, to what extent does a celebration of the lesbian love story at the center of these works depend on oppositions to and/or alliances with other marginalized figures (be these figures characters within the texts themselves or within the larger aesthetic histories of the texts)? Relatedly, what are the lessons of inclusion and exclusion that the novel and film offer a contemporary readership? How queer are *The Price of Salt* and *Carol*, after all?

Similar questions are taken up by the next four essays, which focus on how individuals and groups negotiate personal and collective understandings of gender and sexuality within political contexts that threaten war, unrest, and violence. So, for example, questions of locatedness are simultaneously intensified and circumscribed in Yael Pilowsky Bankirer's "The Posterity of Hiding: A Psychoanalytic Reading of *The Diary of Anne Frank*." In this essay Bankirer explores different registers of violence: the inhumanity that delimited (concentrated?) Anne Frank's self-expressions as she comes of age in hiding; and the editorial eradications that characterizes her diary's publication history. With regard to the latter, despite its worldwide circulation in various editions and formats, the diary has, as Bankirer observes, been subject to numerous deletions and

revisions, many of which de-contextualize and de-politicize the diary. This publication history and more generally the history of the circulation of Anne's story as a diary keeper have had the effect of flattening out her story and overlooking the specificity of her maturation, especially her psychic development, within the context of hiding. Bankirer asserts the significance of the specificity of Anne's locatedness: in particular, Anne's position as a Jew in hiding during the Holocaust and, even more so, as a Jew growing into an understanding of herself as a young woman within the constricted physical space and limited social relations that the secret annex afforded. Drawing on psychoanalytic discussions, Bankirer argues that precisely by "peeping at the world through a key hole," Anne engages in "a different process of growing into womanhood, whereby she reclaims the legitimacy of her voice and challenges basic conceptions of gender and sexuality."

Violence and erasure are also central to Tara Atluri's discussion of gender and sexual diversity in India. In "Trans/itory Belongings: At the Borders of Skin and Citizenship," Atluri begins by considering the case of Shivi, whose parents tried to force their child, a transgender South-Asian American, to live as a cisgender person in India. Atluri argues that the ensuing legal battle, which Shivi ultimately won, discloses the reductive understanding of gender and sexuality held by the Indian diasporas—a perspective that erases not only the vitality of feminist and queer activism in Southeast Asia but also the rich history of India's gender and sexual diversity. As Atluri points out, Western LGBTQI groups, too, are limited in their understanding of "genealogies of gendered transgression and queer activism in non-Western contexts," and as such become implicated in sustaining the legacy of colonial violence.

The next essay turns attention to the possibilities for activist coalition-building. In "The Politics of (Dis-)location: Queer Migration, Activism, and Coalitional Possibilities," Astrid M. Fellner and Eva K. Nossem discuss the work of three different activist groups working at the intersection of queer and undocumented bodies: the Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project (QUIP)/United We Dream and the UndocuQueer Movement, both located in the United States; and Queer Refugees for Pride, established in Germany. Paying particular attention to the nexus of temporality and location, Fellner and Nossem argue that these groups' "strategies …, which situate the constructions of sexual and queer identities within global processes of globalization, capitalism, and nationalism," have the ability "to shift the politics of dislocation to a politics of relocation." Such activist organizations expose and disrupt anti-immigration policies; they also attest to the importance of solidarity, understood in terms of the "simultaneity of coalitional moments in multiple locations of the world."

Whereas Fellner and Nossem examine queer agency on the level of coalitional activism, Alex Karaman, in "Going Out, Not Coming Out: Queer Affects, Secluded Publics, and Palestinian Hip-Hop," analyzes how, for young, queer Palestinians, the practice of going out and supporting (that is, creating and frequenting) secluded hip-hop establishments in Haifa manifests resistance to social as well as political surveillance and oppression. For Karaman, despite the genre's history of sexism and homophobia, hip-hop dance practices do not simply sustain "hetero-/gender-normative mobility-visibility regimes." Instead, such practices also allow queer participants to claim hip-hop spaces as sites of "re-vision," which Rich, in her essay "When We Dead Awaken:

Writing as Re-vision," defines in terms of disruption, renewal, and transformation. Queer Palestinians' engagement with these spaces affords them the possibility "to reformulate and embody hip-hop practices in progressive, counter-cultural, or anti-normative ways," and moreover for Karaman, "gesture[s] towards new directions for a body of Middle Eastern queer theory that militates against cultural imperialism, orientalism, racism, and homonormativity."

Similar to Karaman's study of queer Palestinians' negotiated movement both across the cityscape and on the hip-hop dance floor is Rebecca S. Richards' essay, "Stealth and a Transnational Politics of Location in Videogames." Here, Richards examines the virtual spaces of videogames, and, in particular, the feminist lessons that three games—*République, Horizon: Zero Dawn*, and *Alien: Isolation*—proffer regarding women's vulnerability and surveillance within globalized capitalism. She explicates how the games "creat[e] virtual spaces that simulate" the ways in which "a transnational politics of location plays out on women's bodies." In so doing, these videogames, particularly their procedural limits, disclose how women are compelled to "'sneak' around national identities and rules." Such games, she concludes, offer audiences an object lesson in empathy.

The thematic linkage of corporeal precarity and feminist responsiveness is also at work in the next essay, which takes up Victorian novelist George Eliot's literary engagement with that often overlooked social figure, the kept mistress. In "At Home in Narrative: The Kept Mistress in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*" Katie R. Peel argues that, on the level of both the novel's form and content, Eliot accords Lydia Glasher a dignity and respect rarely experienced by her real-life counterparts. In so doing, the novelist, who herself, in her long-time relationship with George Henry Lewes, occupied the marginalized space of the non-married woman partner, enacts a feminist intervention. With her characterization of Lydia, Eliot not only counters "conventional Victorian ideology" but also offers "a new narrative for kept mistresses, who had previously been invisible in both nineteenth-century fiction and nonfiction."

Shalmalee Palekar's "*Out!* and New Queer Indian Literature" rounds out "'The Politics of Location': Feminist and Queer Spaces within Global Contexts." Like Breen in her essay, Palekar takes up the issue of queerness in literature. In so doing, she brings it to bear on Indian literary texts, specifically through her analysis of two short stories from Minal Hajratwala's 2012 anthology *Out! Stories from the New Queer India*: Sunny Singh's "A Cup Full of Jasmine Oil" and Ashish Sawhny's "Nimbooda, Nimbooda, Nimbooda." Mixing close reading and literary overview, Palekar's essay seeks to delineate "the contradictory, complex, time-and-place-specific discourses that construct queer Indian subjects across diverse religious, gender, and community contexts" and, above all, across literary contexts.

The eight essays comprising this special issue provide suggestive and provocative ways for (re)thinking the politics of location. Whether concerned with transformative possibilities afforded by art or activism, and whether explicitly focused on twenty-first-century texts and issues or those of an earlier time, all of these essays recognize the vulnerability of marginalized bodies. How is it that feminist and queer work can engender spaces—epistemological, geographical, somatic, and

temporal—to dignify and protect those bodies? That is perhaps the most pressing question with which this collection leaves us.

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